ANDROID™ NETRUNNER™
THE CARD GAME

Down the White Nile

Atop the rippling crystal of Lake Victoria sits the skeleton of a second beanstalk. Trade and tourism thrive within the fertile crescent as the Sub-Saharan League, a unity of nations in the midst of an economic and cultural renaissance, works tirelessly to construct the new link between the world of dirt and the limitless expanse. Though determination and focus breed peace within the region, those on the edge wish to disrupt the architecture for personal profit and political vendetta.

White Chambers

My mother was dying on the seat behind me, her coughs and groans growing steadily, all through my breakneck drive to Kisu2 Hospital.

I ignored the camdrones clamoring after me and swung through the hospital gates, hurtling to a halt outside A&E.

The Red Tree staff were ready and waiting, white suited and gloved for action.

Mamma's face was crumpled in unconscious agony as they unloaded her from the back of my groundvan, where she had been lying and foaming her lifeblood onto brown synthleather seats. The van's cleaner-bots were already hoovering up the mess as the three medi-clones from Mti Mkendu gently loaded her body onto their cushioned stretcher.

I swatted the camdrones aside as they buzzed and snapped my face and matched it to my ID. Overkill—they'd pinged and logged my PAD already—but they were obviously keen to avoid any identity-morph legal defenses. I'm a bottom-feeder in the newsbiz, so I know of those rare cases of identity jacking.

This will cost me, no doubt, but some things are worth *any* price.

The chief medi-clone was tagged Alric Schweitzer and was an aging white man with grey hair and a big moustache. I wondered briefly how they had secured genetic material, assuming the label was authentic, of course…And was a white medi-clone meant to be particularly reassuring to us black Africans?

My mother—," I asked him, "will she be okay?

"You are?" He held his hand out for a shake, and I ignored it. His voice was southern Ugandan at least, with not the faintest hint of a Germanic edge.

"Akeyo Achola. Will my mother be fine?"

"Ah, Achola—he who was born after his father's death. I understand." The Schweitzer clone glanced at the bio-readings on the stretcher as the others dipped and prepared to move her. "She has an 81% chance of survival. But we must move quickly."

They moved off and I followed, but a burly clone secguard stopped me from pursuing them through the swinging doors.

"You must decontam first," he growled, pointing across the parking courtyard to a building hissing with decontamination vapors.

I ran across the courtyard to join the queue waiting to enter the building for detoxification, cursing at the delay. Still, I'd heard good reports about this hospital—it had a good survival rate for managing HV-X, the deadly new hemorrhagic virus.

The queue was moving too fragging slowly, so, with my usual newsjacky nosiness, I glanced around the places and spaces of this state-of-the-art hospital and at its gleaming spires and latticed trees, zooming in with my contact lenses via small subvocal commands through my PAD.

I was almost at the front of the queue, about to enter the grey detox building emblazoned with skull and crossbones, when I spotted it: a section cordoned off with holo security tape, almost completely out of view but obviously designed to stop any snoopers.

For just the barest of moments, I hesitated. I was so close to being sprayed and getting the all-clear to go in and check on how mother was doing.

But there—was that a stretcher being wheeled from the back of that parked van into the forbidden zone?

The woman behind me smelled of sweat in the growing heat of the day, and she pushed me toward the door so that it swung open for me.

Just one more step and—

I left the front of the queue and waved her graciously in.

She ignored me, plainly fed up, but she stepped in quickly ahead of me all the same.

Once a snooper, always a snooper: that's what my mother always used to tell me.

I opened the duffle bag at my side and hauled out a coat crucial to my work. Thin, light, and reflective, it's a haze of smoke and mirrors to hide my presence. I shrugged it easily on, over my head, draping it over my body and legs and the bulging bag at my side. The bag was not ideal, I knew, disturbing the cloaking symmetry in operation to some extent, but I had no time to load it back into my car.

I paced across the plascrete lightly, turning a corner of the detox building to face the rear of the hospital. The two clone sentries ignored me, their attention focused on the ambulance depositing its last stretcher.

I ducked carefully under the laser line, crawling with difficulty to avoid tripping any alarms. The bloody stupid bag was banging my right elbow, restricting my movement, and I wondered if my sweating fear would alert the sentries.

Thankfully, they were securing the ambulance doors.

I stood up gingerly, cradling my bag to minimize noise and unpredictable movement, which might disrupt my cloak's protection.

A medi-clone walked alongside the last stretcher, laden with a black death-bag. From a slight opening near the top, two hoses extended, filtering out fluids. The hoses were translucent, one filled with a bubbling bright red, the other with a fetid green.

The clone stopped and sniffed the air. Enhanced nasal senses? I wished I could freeze my sweat.

They started walking again, steering the dripping cadaver bag doorward. I let out a breath I'd been holding.

Only one chance to go in: to follow this last stretcher, past the bonsai twisted into a double helix.

I hesitated. This would be trouble for sure. My mother needed me. I should just go back to the detox queue and be a good and normal citizen.

But the Schweitzer clone had been right. I *had* been born after my father had died and named so, appropriately. HV-V had killed him, all of twenty-eight years ago.

It would be certain trouble if I followed those bodies into the gaping arsehole of the hospital.

What can I say? My name is Akeyo Achola, and I'm my mother's child. I was born for trouble.

I followed the dripping death-bag into the bowels of Kisu2 Hospital.

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